

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Project Name:** Easement application for the installation of a buried fiber optic cable to upgrade Triangle Telephone Cooperative Assn., Inc.'s current facilities and services in the Chester exchange serving area in and around Chester, MT.

**Proposed Implementation Date:** Spring/Summer 2014

**Proponent:** Triangle Telephone Cooperative Assn., Inc., PO Box 1220, Havre, MT 59501

**Location:** See below list of tracts.

**County:** Liberty

**Trust:** Common Schools (CS)

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Triangle Telephone Cooperative Assn., Inc. has requested to install a buried fiber optic cable in order to upgrade their facilities and services in the Chester exchange serving area. The new fiber optic cable will serve the Chester exchange serving area in and around Chester, MT. The proposed easement route is located along existing copper telephone facilities just off of county roads in Liberty County. The fiber optic cable will cross 6 tracts of state land. The fiber optic cable will be buried 42" deep and will be installed using a vibratory plow. The easement will be 20.00' wide through the state owned land.

Township	Range	Section	Fiber Optic Cable Location	Acres Affected	Trust
30N	6E	4	W2W2, NE4NW4	3.728	CS
33N	6E	36	S2S2	2.428	CS
36N	5E	13	SE4NW4	0.709	CS
36N	5E	24	NE4SE4	0.653	CS
36N	6E	19	Lot 3, NE4SW4	0.733	CS
36N	6E	34	NE4SE4	0.606	CS
<b>TOTALS</b>				<b>8.857</b>	<b>CS</b>

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.*

Triangle Telephone Cooperative Assn., Inc.-Proponent  
DNRC-Surface Owner  
Harmon Ranch Inc.-Surface Lessee, Lease #7756  
Windy Prairie Farms, Inc.-Surface Lessee, Lease #7825  
Lance McDowell-Surface Lessee, Lease #5658  
Cicon Ranches Inc.-Surface Lessee, Lease #10153  
Sundgren Enterprises, Inc.-Surface Lessee, Lease #8109

#### 2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project.

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### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny Triangle Telephone Cooperative Assn., Inc. permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Triangle Telephone Cooperative Assn., Inc. permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

### III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

### 4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

*Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.*

Soils at the proposed project site are silty, sandy, and shallow in texture. The topography is gently rolling and the fiber optic cable will be installed along existing copper telephone cables just off of county roads. These soils and slopes are generally suitable for the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. Equipment will cause localized areas of soil compaction and will disturb the soil where the buried fiber optic cable is being placed. Reclamation requirements are to compact and level the plow scar created in the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. Then, seed the impacted area with the existing grass types and seeding rates that are listed in item 7 of this assessment. Cumulative impacts on soil resources are not expected as the use of a vibratory plow will minimize the surface disturbance caused by the construction project.

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### 5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

*Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.*

There are numerous water rights associated with these tracts; however none of these water rights will be impacted by the proposed easement. Other water quality and/or quantity issues will not be impacted by the proposed action.

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### 6. AIR QUALITY:

*What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.*

The proposed action will not impact the air quality.

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### 7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

*What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.*

Vegetation will be minimally impacted as approximately 3.65 miles of buried fiber optic cable will be installed by the utilization of a vibratory plow. The vegetation consists primarily of native species, introduced species, and agricultural land. Noxious and annual weeds within the proposed construction areas are a concern, but this concern will be mitigated as the applicants are responsible for controlling weeds within the construction areas. Cumulative impacts on the vegetative resources are not expected as the proposed construction areas will be reclaimed and reseeded. The reseeding mixture will consist of a grass seed mixture of 35% Western Wheatgrass, 35% Slender Wheatgrass, 15% Bluebunch Wheatgrass, 10% Green Needle grass, and 5% Lewis blue flax. If drilled the rate will be 8#/acre, but if broadcast seeded, the rate will be doubled.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T30N, R6E: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T33N, R6E: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T36N, R5E: There was one species of concern and zero potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey: Flowering Plants (Dicots)-Northern Buttercup.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T36N, R6E: There were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

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## **8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:**

*Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.*

The area is not considered critical wildlife habitat. However, these tracts provide habitat for a variety of big game species (mule deer, whitetail deer, and pronghorn antelope), predators (coyote, fox, and badger), upland game birds (sharp tail grouse, Hungarian partridge), other non-game mammals, raptors and various songbirds. The proposal does not include any land use change which would yield changes to the wildlife habitat. The proposed action will not impact wildlife forage, cover, or traveling corridors. Nor will this action change the juxtaposition of wildlife forage, water, or hiding and thermal cover. Wildlife usage is expected to return to "normal" (pre-action usage) following the installation of the buried fiber optic cable. The proposed action will not have long-term negative effects on existing wildlife species and/or wildlife habitat.

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## **9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:**

*Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area.*

*Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.*

Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by proposal.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T30N, R6E. There were nine animal species of concern, four potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Birds—Baird's Sparrow, Great Blue Heron, Ferruginous Hawk, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Greater Sage-Grouse, Loggerhead Shrike, Long-billed Curlew, McCown's Longspur, and Short-eared Owl. Reptiles—Greater Short-horned Lizard. Fish—Brook Stickleback, Brassy Minnow, and Burbot. This particular tract of agricultural and grazing land does not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T33N, R6E. There were six animal species of concern, zero potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Birds—Burrowing Owl, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Loggerhead Shrike, Long-billed Curlew, McCown's Longspur, and Brewer's Sparrow. This particular tract of grazing land does not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T36N, R5E. There were five animal species of concern, zero potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Birds—Northern Goshawk, Sprague's Pipit, Veery, Bobolink, and Clark's Nutcracker. These particular tracts of grazing land do not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T36N, R6E. There were two animal species of concern, zero potential species of concern, and zero special status species noted on the NRIS survey: Birds—Sprague's Pipit and Veery. These particular tracts of agricultural and grazing land do not contain many, if any of these species. Threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern or potential species of concern will not be impacted by the installation of a buried fiber optic cable.

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#### **10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

*Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.*

A Class II and III Cultural Resource Inventory of the project area were performed by Ethos Consultants Inc. during April and May of 2013. No historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources were identified along the proposed construction corridor. The proposed project is next to existing copper telephone facilities and will be placed just off of existing county roads. No historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources were identified along the proposed construction corridor, so no cultural resources will be impacted by this proposed action.

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#### **11. AESTHETICS:**

*Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.*

Installation of the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the aesthetics of the land in any way as it will not be visible. It will lead to no erosion of the soil resources on the tracts as the line is located below the soil surface.

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#### **12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:**

*Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.*

The demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.

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#### **13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:**

*List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.*

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tract listed on this EA.

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### **IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION**

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

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#### **14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:**

*Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.*

The proposed project will not change human safety in the area.

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#### **15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

*Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.*

The results of this project will not affect the industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities or production in the area.

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#### **16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:**

*Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.*

This project will not create any new jobs, as the project will be completed in house by the proponent.

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**17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:**

*Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.*

The proposed action will add to the tax revenue.

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**18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:**

*Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services*

This project is of a small scale and being funded by Triangle Telephone Cooperative Assn., Inc. There will be no excessive stress placed on the existing infrastructure of the area.

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**19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:**

*List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.*

The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

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**20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:**

*Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.*

These proposed project areas are next to the existing county roads which generally have low recreational value. These tracts are legally accessible and the proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on these state tracts.

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**21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:**

*Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing*

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

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**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

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**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

*How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?*

The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the area.

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**24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:**

*Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.*

This project will benefit the school trust in terms of the \$50.00 fee generated from each of the six easement applications for a total of \$300.00. The easement on the Common Schools trust land will affect 2.736 acres of agricultural land X \$500.00 per acre equals \$1,368.00 and 6.121 acres of grazing land X \$450.00 per acre equals \$2,754.45. The total acres affected by the easement are 8.857 acres and the total revenue generated is \$4,122.45 from the future easement. Cumulative impacts are not likely as the area is only used for grazing and the buried fiber optic cable will not affect the long-term viability of grazing on the tracts.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Tony Nickol	<b>Date:</b> September 18, 2013
	<b>Title:</b> Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

## V. FINDINGS

### 25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Triangle Telephone Cooperative Assn., Inc. permission to install the buried fiber optic cable.

### 26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The applicant is applying for an easement across 6 tracts of state land with a buried fiber optic cable. Significant impacts are not anticipated as a result of the selected alternative. Disturbed areas will be reclaimed and reseeded in accordance with specifications outlined in this EAc. The surface lessee's have been notified and do not anticipate any damages.

### 27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EIS

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Erik Eneboe
	<b>Title:</b> Conrad Unit Manger, CLO, DNRC
<b>Signature:</b> 	
<b>Date:</b> September 25, 2013	

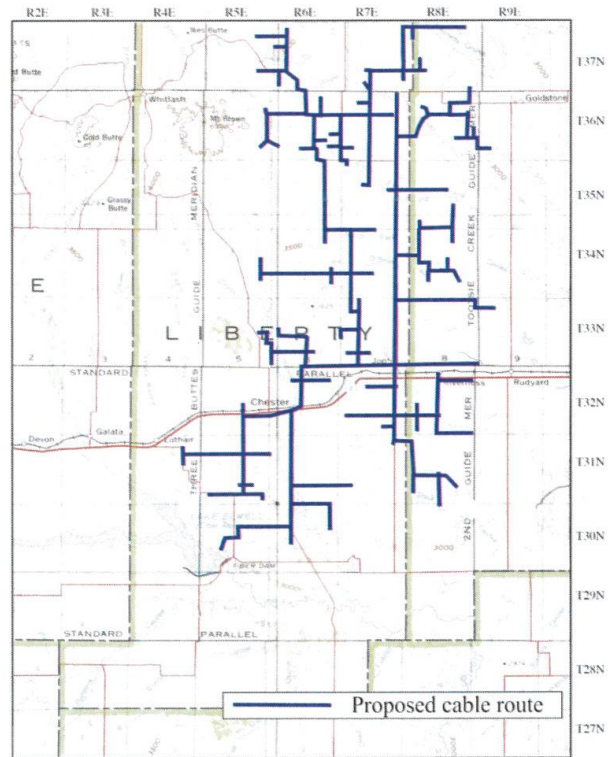
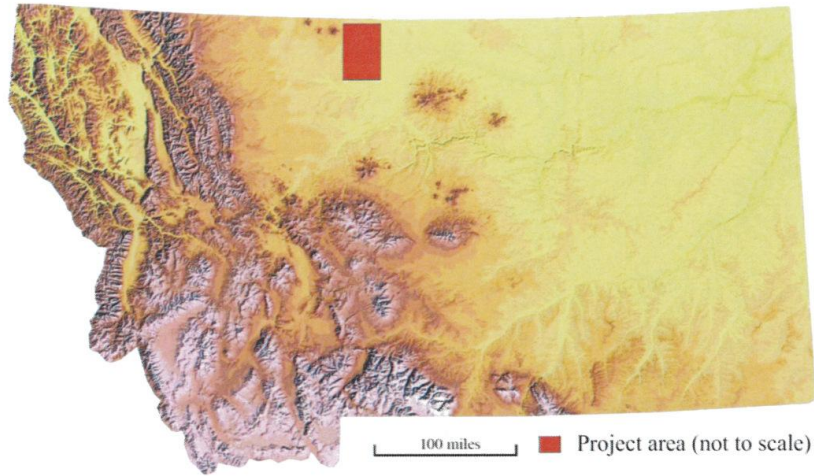


Figure 1: General project location.